

PI External Reviews: Summary of Report
Community Based Natural Resource Management
(CBNRM)

Report to IDRC Board of Governors
March 2004

Reviewers:

Dr. Julian Gonsalves
Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Consultant, India

Dr. Lorelei Mandoza
Professor of Economics, University of the Philippines

Summary prepared by Evaluation Unit

PI Aims

1. In spite of the best intentions of national governments in Asia to conserve natural resources by taking over the responsibility for their care, degradation of resources has continued to take place. Degradation affects livelihoods and destabilizes the natural resource base for future generations. Many governments are therefore decentralizing the management of natural resources to local governments and local communities but often lack information on locally relevant models. IDRC's CBNRM PI was designed to address natural resource degradation and rural poverty problems in the mountainous, upland and coastal areas of South, East and South East Asia.
2. CBNRM's goal is to develop and transfer technical, methodological, analytical, social/institutional and policy innovations for more productive, equitable and sustainable natural resource use by communities in ecosystems facing environmental stress and degradation in Asia. Its specific objectives are to:
 - 2.1. Identify and analyse the local resources and livelihoods under greatest threat and disaggregate the micro- and macro-causal factors leading to degradation, as well as the differential impacts such degradation is likely to have on women and men;
 - 2.2. Develop new technologies or adaptations of indigenous systems which make more productive and sustainable use of privately- and collectively-managed resources at the community level;
 - 2.3. Improve or promote institutions for the assessment, management and monitoring of natural resource use at the local level;
 - 2.4. Develop new mechanisms and processes for resource planning, access to information, co-management and policy interaction between local communities and various levels of government;
 - 2.5. Compare and exchange lessons and experience in CBNRM between communities, research institutions, and government agencies within the region and in Canada.

Review Methodology

3. Data collection relied on several methods: a review of documents, interviews of program and team members, an e-mail survey of project leaders, and field visits to four sites. The project sites chosen represent CBNRM work in the mountains, uplands and coastal areas and were exemplars of where program objectives were achieved. Interviews by e-mail were conducted for CBNRM collaborators and partners. Over a dozen

individuals including donor representatives and academicians were contacted via email.

Review Findings

4. The PI has made impressive and highly visible **progress** in natural resource management research. The PI has project sites in eleven countries, achieving an impressive geographic spread and breadth. Site-specific projects in differing ecosystems have been successfully established on community forestry, coastal and freshwater management, and resource management policy, among others.
5. IDRC did very well to emphasize **site-based, action-research** because of the need to demonstrate that alternatives did exist to top-down (blue-print) approaches to natural resource governance. Undertaken with a range of local stakeholders, action-research has served as proof of the validity of the concept. Site-based research has been a powerful mechanism for influencing policy makers, local government officials, and donors:
 - 5.1. Site-based research is often the focal point around which national networking takes place. This is the case in Ratanakiri province in Cambodia, where participatory land use planning techniques were developed and are now being scaled up across Cambodia with SIDA and UNDP support.
 - 5.2. In a project on community forestry research in Kampot province in Cambodia, the Kampot provincial governor signed a community forestry regulation in 2001, and the local community has been drafting community forestry management plans to submit for official recognition in early 2004. Community members can demonstrate with data that regeneration is taking place, that incomes are influenced by non-timber forest products, and that with the re-growth of forests, nutrient flows to neighbouring rice paddies have raised yield by 1-1.5 tons.
6. The PI has been very conscious of the need to maintain a wide **diversity** of sites -- community forests, mangroves, rangelands, freshwater and coastal fisheries and upland watersheds -- as these provide a range of learning opportunities of relevance to cross-site synthesis.
7. In spite of the multiplicity and diversity (in NRM research this is considered a positive attribute), what the PI has succeeded in putting into place is a regional **program**. Consistency with PI objectives is, overall, very strong. The CBNRM prospectus and programming over its different phases remain relevant, robust and reflective of the needs of partners. Partners have a strong sense of **ownership** of the CBNRM program and its approaches. The

use of local languages has been essential in this sense of ownership.

8. CBNRM recognizes the **long term nature** of its work and is committed to supporting partners over longer rather than shorter time frames. Almost all partners have the opportunity to tap IDRC funds over two or three phases. This allows for projects to consolidate learnings and shift emphases.
9. The PI has supported a wide range of **publications**. The diversity of publications reflects the different contexts, needs, priorities and skill bases from one country to another. The Cambodia initiative is well ahead of others in acknowledging the value of a communications approach that uses multiple media, including posters, case studies, CD-ROMs, and a national workshop. CBNRM and its partners' use of websites for information sharing is also to be commended.
10. The CBNRM program has established itself as a major source of **information** and is starting to use its publications in a purposeful and effective manner to exchange field-derived experiences among researchers, development practitioners and local government officials. The Coastal Resources work in the Philippines is among the few projects that have recognized the need for education and communication materials for use at the community level. Otherwise, publications being produced do not adequately serve as outreach to communities. Not having instituted policy briefs, CBNRM is also missing out on an important opportunity to convey key messages to policy makers. Policy dialogue workshops, tested in the CBNRM project led by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), are another means to sensitize policy makers to including local perspectives in policy.
11. CBNRM has successfully introduced "**writeshops**". These are capacity-building activities in which research writing, analytical and presentation skills are sharpened in a process that involves critical review by peers. IIRR in the Philippines, the Case Study initiative in Cambodia, and the Lagoon project in Hue have all used "writeshops" very creatively and for different purposes.
12. Success in getting partners to **internalize and value CBNRM approaches** is one of the program's most impressive accomplishments. Research teams now have a deeper grasp and common understanding of the concepts and applications of CBNRM principles, although definitions and frameworks are context-specific.
13. The CBNRM program has been deliberate in its **choice of countries and research institutions**, emphasizing those that did not previously benefit from research-strengthening interventions. It often started off its work with relatively weak research institutions, including those with very weak social

science capacities in countries with economies in transition. The PI has used a wide range of innovative **approaches to enhance individual and organizational research capacities**, including training, mentoring, peer review of research, networking, small grants, the enhancement of information technology infrastructure, and strategic engagement of Northern institutions.

14. The sensitization to gender issues, interdisciplinarity, peer-review of research and team work which characterized most projects visited suggest that **capacity-building** efforts were highly effective. Researchers report that CBNRM has contributed to their acquisition of conceptual and methodological skills, and their ability to disseminate research results, to manage research and to lead and facilitate groups to plan and organize research. Partners also reported influences on organizational capacities such as improved capacities for organizational planning, monitoring and evaluation, for research management, and for being a center of excellence in CBNRM research or training.
15. **Methodological innovations** are an important part of CBNRM's capacity-strengthening efforts. CBNRM has specifically crafted projects dealing with social and gender analysis, participatory development communications, stakeholder information systems, scaling up and out, tools for networking and communication, and evaluating organizational capacity development. Participatory monitoring and evaluation has been an important component of some research efforts.
16. The reviewers noted a consistently strong emphasis on and impressive level of use of **participatory methods** by CBNRM research teams. In Hong Ha, Vietnam, the process associated with participatory research had resulted in lasting, leadership-enhancing outcomes (which might outlast the technological innovations they were associated with).
17. CBNRM projects have provided **content to courses** offered by universities. For example:
 - 17.1. At the University of British Columbia, in each of four courses taught via the Internet, there is a CD-Rom textbook where case studies from various CBNRM projects are featured. Several individuals who teach at universities in Vietnam, Philippines, Laos, Nepal China and Thailand use these CDs in their classes. Beyond Asia, these CDs have found their way into universities in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Brazil, Columbia and Chile.
 - 17.2. The Certificate in Community-based Resource Management offered by the Coady Institute features three different case studies that have been generated through the CBNRM projects in Asia.

- 17.3. Project-generated CDs of CBNRM are used as teaching materials in classes in the Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry and at the Royal University of Forestry in Cambodia.
18. The CBNRM approach does not depend on a single disciplinary framework and therefore lends itself to a **problem-focused and people-centred** orientation. The choice to be “participatory” is not simply choosing a method over another. It is declaring that this is the way to do development research, i.e. people-driven, democratic.
19. IDRC’s CBNRM program was probably ahead of the rest of the international agriculture research system in acknowledging the need for **balancing natural and social sciences** in research. A balance between natural and social scientists appears to have been achieved in CBNRM’s work, although there is a need to continuously upgrade partners’ capacities in both the natural and social sciences. Rigour in partners’ participatory and social science work is uneven at present. The PI has responded well to this with social and gender analysis and other methods. The next step is to raise the level of social scientific conceptualization through peer review of papers, presentations at academic and policy-oriented conferences, and refereed publications, and to deepen the participatory research approaches.
20. The reach and impact of CBNRM projects at the **local level** is noteworthy. Research teams are also starting to emphasise the **vertical up-scaling** of strategies in order to influence policy. While achievements of vertically scaled-up impact are noted in a few of the countries, the reviewers feel that the real payoff will accrue over the next three to five years and the PI will have to continue to support current commitments with targeted, focused and quality-enhancing support measures.
21. With a team of fewer than six program officers, the sheer challenges of managing a wide **portfolio** (over 100 project activities were supported with slightly more than half being multi-year activities) is itself a huge accomplishment of the PI.
22. A collaborative spirit characterizes the **PI’s relationship with its partners**, both on an individual project level and at the program level. Evidence is found in the substantive inputs that partners have contributed to the conceptualisation and evolution of the PI. Beginning with a strong focus on issues of the environment and natural resources, the PI now pays special attention to issues of governance and livelihoods. The PI’s prospectus has remained relevant and robust with its unwavering attention to the attainment of security of tenure for local communities.

23. It is a remarkable achievement that the CBNRM program has been successful in convincing **policy makers** of the importance of community-derived, action-research experiences. A new respect for local knowledge and local capacities is evident wherever the reviewers met with local officials responsible for CBNRM projects. Some examples:
- 23.1. In Cambodia, officials' opportunities to observe practical applications of CBNRM approaches in resource management and governance influenced sub-decrees on community forestry, community fishery and protected areas and land use planning legislation. The PI, through its partners, also made investments in strategic events such as the public consultation processes, supported the participation of policy makers to policy meetings, and held a major national conference.
 - 23.2. There is wide support at different levels for CBNRM principles and approaches in Bhutan. In Bhutan, support was extended for the formulation of a national framework on CBNRM which involved workshops, consultations and the development of case studies, with an international conference in November 2003.
 - 23.3. The PI-supported project "Catalyzing Action on Local Water Management" targeted major water events (the Third World Water Forum and the Annual Stockholm Forum) with its two publications "Rethinking the mosaic" and "Fluid mosaic". Partner researchers also participated in panel discussions and in other high-profile events aimed at raising the level and quality of informed dialogue.
24. The reviewers were impressed with the **gender sensitivity** demonstrated in the Vietnam projects, relative to what they saw in Cambodia, in terms of the coverage of gender themes and issues in the reports, overall gender sensitivity, and the active role of women in training and meetings. The influences were traced to a major CBNRM initiative aimed at enhancing capacity to engender research for sustainable development, conducted during 1999-2001. This project was undertaken with the Centre for Family and Women's Studies in Ha Noi, in partnership with Laval University in Canada. It was evident that faculty from the Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry had benefited much from this program and had internalized principles of social and gender analysis incorporating this into their research. The project used an iterative approach to building capacities, involving workshops, mentoring and implementation research, a model which contrasts starkly with single event (usually training) approaches used by many agencies.
25. From the outset, CBNRM has had a pro-poor orientation, adopting a **poverty alleviation** focus ahead of the international agricultural research system. The program's focus on degrading environments in Cambodia,

Vietnam, and Nepal has generated unusually strong expressions of government support (and, more recently, recognition), as well as support from the donor community.

26. CBNRM has had considerable success in using **networks**. Strong encouragement is given to participating members to articulate and pursue locally-generated goals within the structure of the network. Networking has facilitated the exchange of expertise, skills and experience between and among “Northern” and “Southern” scholars and institutions, and has enabled capacity-building and research-based advocacy work.
27. **Networking** also plays a pivotal role in harnessing the efforts of individual CBNRM projects into a forceful national presence. This is the case in Cambodia, where the CBNRM Case Study and Networking Initiative facilitates the exchange of lessons among Cambodian projects and enables them together to influence national policies and regulations for community forestry, community fisheries, land use planning and participatory management of protected areas. Similar networking is underway in Vietnam, where bringing together university-based projects has potential to create a powerful voice to put CBNRM on the national policy agenda. Many of the upland projects working with indigenous communities could also benefit from cross-project exchange.
28. Web-based **information sharing** systems in place in most CBNRM projects serve well in providing CBNRM content and disseminating experiences. The regular use of CD ROM technologies to document and share results, and video documentation, have greatly facilitated the sharing of information with colleagues. The Virtual Resource Centre concept, a tool for interactive exchange among partners, is being tested in CBNRM projects.
29. CBNRM continues to attract increasing levels of **parallel funding** for its work. This has extended the funding base for IDRC’s local partners but more importantly, it serves as an indicator of the growing appreciation among the donor community of the relevance of community-based approaches in addressing natural resource management and livelihood issues in the region. CBNRM partnerships with other donors have influenced larger programs in Cambodia, such as that of the FAO, ADB and SIDA, and projects such as SDC’s. The PI can further capitalize on opportunities to leverage parallel funding by being more deliberate in its efforts to seek out and influence donors.
30. A number of CBNRM partners (over a dozen) have chosen to use self-evaluations in their work. This is an innovative approach and an impressive effort which builds a culture of learning, transparency and accountability. The PI itself has undertaken numerous project-level **evaluations**, mainly internal

ones. More emphasis should have been given to external project evaluations, for example featuring project leaders from other sites. The PI took the advice of the 1999 external review to invest in capacity-building for its partner institutions.

31. The adoption of **decentralization** by governments in Asia provides a welcome framework for the CBNRM approach. Decentralization becomes the vehicle by which CBNRM experience in one or several research sites within a country like Cambodia or Vietnam can become the model for natural resource management policy formulation and implementation. One may also look at CBNRM experience as the concrete content of a decentralization movement through which local-level government units and local community members are enabled to meaningfully participate. In Bhutan, the government is promoting CBNRM as a tangible way for increasing participation of local communities in its decentralization efforts.
32. **Other trends** relevant to CBNRM and which it could explore further than it has to date include local organisational capacity-building, conflict resolution, sustainable livelihoods, the integrated natural resource management approach of the CGIAR, environment and human health (drawing on lessons from IDRC's EcoHealth PI), and agriculture.

Issues for Consideration

33. In a portfolio that otherwise covers an impressive range of ecological environments and resources, the absence of a field-based action research site of special relevance to the semi-arid tropics is conspicuous. The PI would do well to consider at least one new site devoting attention to questions that have relevance to literally millions of very poor people in South Asia, even if it implies adding a new program officer to the team.
34. Better documentation of the methodological dimensions of participatory research is essential if the use of participatory research and related methods is to be extended to other communities. The PI could also further document its capacity-building approaches and methods, as well as encourage further publication on the interdisciplinary study of resource management.
35. The PI could do more towards producing materials for use at the community level, and to influence policy makers through a variety of approaches (such as policy briefs, and use of a writeshop approach). A good analysis of the different national policy environments in different countries will be another important starting point.
36. The PI has been accumulating a rich trove of local-level wisdom through the CBNRM projects. What stands out and begs attention is a concerted

effort at the program level to synthesize lessons and best practices. Comparative analysis across sites within a country, among countries within a region and between regions in Asia awaits to be done. For not only will this provide a watershed for further methodological innovations and more-informed action research projects, it will become the fountain that will nourish a CBNRM agenda at the 'policy' table of governments seeking alternatives to failed 'state'-managed systems over forests, fisheries and protected areas.